

SECTION NINE

Education and Publicity

A HHW collection program cannot succeed without a strong public education effort that provides general information about HHW and specific instructions about how to participate on collection day. This education also might benefit the community by reducing the quantity of HHW collected in subsequent programs. It is still too early to know, however, just how effective educational efforts will be in reducing the generation of HHW. At current collection program participation rates, it will be some time before the stored waste is cleaned out of a community. It is likely, though, that the amount of waste per participant will decrease in communities with regular or permanent collection programs. Many examples of well-planned education programs are available. Sources for these materials are listed in Appendix C.

Target the Audience

Residents are the most important target of a HHW education program. Information about HHW also should reach public officials, civic groups, solid waste personnel, and the business community to encourage financial support, donations of in-kind services, or other assistance. The media is an especially important vehicle; media understanding of HHW issues helps ensure accurate and responsible reporting. Educators need resources to develop and communicate a strong understanding of the issue to the people they teach. Manufacturers, retail stores, school chemistry departments, hospitals, agricultural extension services, and farmers also can benefit from education about HHW.

Determine the Message and Select Educational Methods

Public education about HHW is a good idea even if a HHW collection event is not yet planned. The scope of this effort will depend on the funds and personnel available. Early education can focus on:

- What products contain hazardous constituents.
- How household generation of hazardous waste can contribute to pollution.
- Why source reduction is a major goal of a HHW management program. (Source

reduction is defined as the design, manufacture, purchase, or use of materials or products to reduce their amount or toxicity before they enter the solid waste stream.)

- What products contain fewer or no hazardous constituents.
- How to shop “smart” (e.g., buying only what is needed).
- How to reduce the amount of HHW generated (e.g., using up household products or giving away what cannot be used).
- How to use products in a way that minimizes harm to the environment.
- How to properly store and handle products containing hazardous constituents in the home.

Public education before a planned collection day should not only focus on identifying HHW and helping people understand the hazards associated with HHW, but also should present the sponsor’s plans for addressing HHW management. Public education efforts also should communicate the individual’s role in the HHW management program, including what to bring to a collection and how to transport it safely. This phase of the education program should begin at least six months before the collection day. Intensified education in the final two weeks before a collection day can have a major impact on participation rates.

Publicity, a component of public education, focuses on a single goal—bringing the

Public Education Methods and Techniques

Education through the media. Well-prepared media handouts-feature articles, public service announcements, and other materials for the press—m inexpensive options and require less staff time than many other educational methods. Information about HHW can be presented in a variety of ways. For example, a radio broadcast might feature a hazardous waste expert who can answer phone-in questions on HHW. A local television station can cover a tour through a home with an environmental expert, who can discuss the products that can become HHW and how to manage them safely.

Information and referral services. A publicly advertised local telephone hotline can encourage people to call for information about managing HHW, and also can facilitate a waste exchange/referral service. These services can be effective but require telephones, office space, training, and personnel.

Mailings and mailing inserts. Utilities, banks, billers, and advertisers may be willing to include HHW announcements and informational literature in their regular mailings. Inserts mailed with water bills, garbage bills, or tax bills not only provide information about HHW, but also can educate the public about the links between HHW generation, waste management ground-water protection, and water/garbage rates. Community groups can include educational information about HHW management in their mailings or newsletters. HHW program sponsors can send direct mailings to people who participated in previous HHW collections.

Posters, handouts, and brochures. Flyers and posters often are displayed or handed out at schools, libraries, community centers, and senior citizen centers. Businesses can post signs and notices for shoppers and customers on how to safely manage household products that might become HHW. Real estate agents can offer their clients information about HHW with their other community resource materials. Solid waste facility personnel at drop-off landfills, transfer stations, and recycling centers can discuss HHW and provide written information when residents drop off waste or recyclable. Handouts can include HHW “wheels” that highlight the potential hazards of household products and suggest less hazardous substitutes (see Appendix c).

Garbage can labeling. Some communities distribute plastic adhesive labels that residents can put on their trash cans. The labels alert people to the potential hazards of mixing HHW with their trash, list products containing hazardous constituents, and advertise whereto dispose of HHW properly.

Street banners. Banners announcing the place and time of collection have worked well for some communities.

Displays/exhibits/audiovisual presentations. Public education staff can use slide shows, video presentations, and hands-on exhibits at community group meetings, county fairs or other special events, public information sessions/workshops, shopping malls, and other public forums. For example, the League of Women Voters of Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts, bought a video on managing HHW and offered it free to any group on the island who would show it at a meeting. (Slide shows available for rental or purchase are listed in Appendix C.) The local public library also might be willing to set up a HHW resource center.

Speaker bureau. Municipal departments usually have access to knowledgeable speakers who can make presentations to local groups at a nominal fee or free of charge. Sources for community education experts include cooperative extension services, soil and water conservation districts, and health and solid/hazardous waste administrators.

Formal education. Presentations in schools and special curricula can educate students (and their parents) about managing HHW. A number of organizations have developed school curricula on HHW (see Appendix C).

Point-of-purchase information. Information about the potential hazards of household products can be distributed where the products are sold. For example, hardware stores can distribute handout on what to do with used motor oil, paints or varnishes. An Iowa law requires stores that sell products covered under the shelf labeling law to provide HHW content and hazard information through shelf labeling and informational materials. A hardware store chain in San Diego, California voluntarily initiated a similar program.

Workshops and conferences. Workshops, presentations, and conferences on managing HHW can be an excellent way to bring information to citizens, HHW program volunteers, local business groups, and community officials.

EDUCATION AND PUBLICITY

desired number of participants (and HHW) safely to a collection program. Good publicity explains:

- Why people should participate in HHW collection programs.
- When and where the collection will be held.
- Which materials will be accepted and which will be excluded.
- What to do with excluded HHW.
- How to transport HHW to the collection center.

To maximize participation in the collection program, publicity should begin as soon as a date for the collection is chosen. The publicity should appear on a regular basis, highlighting progress in the planning, presenting additional facts about HHW, and providing contacts for more information.

Advertising in local newspapers and newsletters is a highly effective form of publicity. The local press usually will publish articles, photographs, and letters to the editor. The planning committee should prepare a press kit to facilitate newspaper publicity. It should contain:

- A list of local contacts and experts who can answer questions about HHW.
- Press releases about the HHW management program and the upcoming HHW collection(s).
- Two or three short feature articles.
- Black and white photographs (with captions) of hazardous materials (in the home, on store shelves, at collection programs) that can either stand alone or be used with news or feature articles.



- Press-ready ads publicizing the collection day. Newspapers and radio and TV stations might run these ads free of charge on a space-available basis, or local firms might sponsor them.

Local groups, such as civic groups, public agencies, schools, local media, and businesses, often are willing to help with publicity and outreach. A local advertising agency or public relations firm might agree to plan or produce the publicity campaign. Invite the firm to participate on the planning committee.